



To: General Counsel Quinn Williams
From: Richard Thal and Christine Buswell
Re: Investigation Report – Dwight Watson
Date: September 24, 2020

INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

SCOPE AND ALLEGATIONS

This report addresses allegations made by [REDACTED] ([REDACTED]) against UW-Whitewater (UWW) Chancellor Dwight Watson (Watson). In a Facebook message sent on September 1, 2020 to UWW, [REDACTED] alleged that Watson sexually abused [REDACTED] when [REDACTED] was a student at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI); that Watson’s resignation from UNI “was due to sexual misconduct,” and that Watson “crossed boundaries with students, even of other countries” such as at Southwest Minnesota State University (SMSU).

This report is limited to addressing those allegations and their relationship to potential violations of relevant UWW and UW System policies, including: (1) whether or not Watson was truthful during the hiring process when asked if he was ever found to have engaged in any sexual violence or sexual harassment at prior institutions, or left employment during an active investigation in which he was accused of sexual violence or sexual harassment,¹ and (2) whether there were allegations or evidence that Watson committed sexual misconduct with students while at UWW.²

INVESTIGATION SUMMARY

- 1. Watson was truthful during the hiring process when he answered “No” to the question whether he was ever found to have engaged in any sexual violence or sexual harassment at prior institutions, or left employment during an active investigation in which he was accused of sexual violence or sexual harassment.**

[REDACTED]’s allegation that Watson sexually abused him during Watson’s tenure at UNI was investigated by UNI, and UNI concluded, based on a preponderance of the evidence, that Watson did not violate UNI’s policy on discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct.

¹ Addressing the first issue required review and consideration of [UW System Administrative Policy 1275 \(formerly TC 1\), Recruitment Policies](#), which requires that prior to being hired a final candidate must be asked whether they were ever found to have engaged in any sexual violence or sexual harassment and whether they are currently under investigation or have ever left employment during an active investigation in which they were accused of sexual violence or sexual harassment and [UW System Administrative Policy 1292 \(formerly WE 3\), Workplace Conduct Expectations](#), under which all UW System employees must act with integrity.

² Addressing the second issue required review and consideration of [Regent Policy Document 14-2, Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment](#), and the [UW-Whitewater Sexual Violence, Sexual Harassment and Intimate Partner Violence Policy](#).

Watson did not resign from UNI due to ██████'s sexual misconduct allegations.

2. There have been no allegations or evidence that Watson committed sexual misconduct with students during his tenure at UWW.

The allegation made by ██████ of Watson crossing boundaries with other students relates to an individual who may or not have been a student during Watson's tenure at SMSU. When SMSU was contacted, they confirmed that there were no records of any complaints or investigations in the personnel file of Watson related to sexual misconduct at SMSU. ██████ did not allege any sexual misconduct by Watson during his tenure at UWW, and we found no evidence of such misconduct.

TIMELINE

Since June of 2019 Watson has been the Chancellor at UW-Whitewater. Prior to accepting that position, he served as the Provost at Southwest Minnesota State University (2015-2019), Dean of the College of Education at the University of Northern Iowa (2010-2015), Associate Dean of the UW-Eau Claire Teacher Education Program (2007-2010), and Chair of the Department of Education at Hamline University (2002-2007).

The following is a timeline of Watson's interactions with ██████:

Spring 2014 – Watson meets and befriends ██████³
5/2014 – ██████ graduates from UNI
2014 (May or June) – After he graduates from UNI and after his son is born, ██████, his son, and his son's mother reside with Watson in his Waterloo apartment for six months, and ██████ continues to live with Watson for an additional two months
8/23/14 – ██████ informs UNI that he was sexually harassed when a student, but no investigation was initiated because he did not follow up with specific allegations, and Watson was not informed of the allegation
1/31/15 – Watson applies for the SMSU provost position
3/3/2015 – ██████ verbally alleges to UNI that he was sexually harassed by Watson, and UNI initiates an investigation into whether Watson engaged in sexual misconduct
5/1/2015 – Watson is offered the position of provost at SMSU
5/6/2015 – UNI investigative report is distributed, with the conclusion, based on a preponderance of the evidence, that Watson did not violate UNI's policy on discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct
5/7/2015 – Date of the letter confirming that Watson had been offered and had accepted the position of provost at SMSU
2017-2019 – ██████ is in jail and prison during portions of this period
5/2019 – ██████ released on parole with the condition that he have a stable place to reside; Watson agrees that his residence in Marshall, Minnesota could be that place
5/2019 – Watson and ██████, who was still on parole, move to Whitewater
6/14/19 – Watson begins employment at UWW as Chancellor
8/15/2020 – ██████ moves out of Chancellor Watson's home
9/1/2020 – ██████ sends UWW a Facebook message in which he makes allegations against Watson

³ ██████ recalled that he met Watson prior to 2014.

WITNESS INTERVIEWS

██████████

In a Facebook message sent to UW-Whitewater on September 1, 2020, ██████████ stated that Watson sexually abused him when he was a student at the University of Northern Iowa. That message stated:

I was sexually abused by Dwight Watson as a student at UNI. Since then I have dealt with the bondage of his mental manipulation in trying to divert my perspective from the truth. I have evidence of the gaslighting. As I protected myself and was in fear from past interactions. I stopped communicating. The outside things he is envious and lustful of. Please question his resignation from UNI. It was due to sexual misconduct and I have witnessed him cross boundaries with students, even of other countries such as at SMSU.

The following italicized message is a text message that purports to be from Watson to ██████████ and that ██████████ included in his Facebook message to UWW because he claims it provides evidence of the gaslighting referenced in the allegation:

The shaving of your head, the Mohawk, the bandanas. This was like a scene out of Taxi Driver. The meanness, the not talking, the daring me to look at you. These things scared me. I did not feel safe.

When interviewed, ██████████ stated that he first met Watson when he (██████████) was a student and working in Cedar Falls, Iowa at ██████████, a store that sells ██████████. ██████████ stated that he and Watson developed a sexual relationship within the first few months of meeting. ██████████ graduated from UNI in May of 2014. Shortly after graduation, Watson allowed ██████████, his newborn son, and his son's mother to live with him in his apartment for about four months because they had no other place to live.

██████████ stated that he moved to Iowa City in 2015, and when in Iowa City ██████████ talked to the UNI Title IX Coordinator and verbally alleged that Watson engaged in sexual abuse of ██████████. ██████████ stated that he never saw a copy of UNI's investigative report, but – according to ██████████ – UNI asked Watson to resign after the university investigated ██████████'s allegations.

██████████ acknowledged that Watson has helped him a great deal. But ██████████ also stated that when he lived with Watson in Whitewater, he resented Watson because of the times he withheld help and wanted ██████████ to be dependent on him.

When asked about his allegation of Watson crossing boundaries with other students, ██████████ claimed that Watson (then the Provost at SMSU) "crossed boundaries" with a student at SMSU but was unable to point to additional instances of Watson crossing boundaries.

Dwight Watson

Watson stated that he knew that ██████████ had demonstrated a pattern of previously ending relationships with people who had cared for him, such as family, friends, and co-workers. And Watson knew that ██████████ had been vengeful when he accused Watson of sexual harassment in 2015. But in 2019 Watson nevertheless reluctantly invited ██████████ to move into his residence in Minnesota because Watson thought that ██████████ might violate his parole conditions and be sent to prison again unless he had a stable place to reside. Given this

situation, Watson invited ██████ to then move with him to Whitewater in May 2019 with the understanding that ██████ would reside with him for no longer than one year.

Watson shared that he informed then-President Ray Cross and the UWW cabinet that he would be bringing a young white male who was recently released from prison to live with him in Whitewater. Watson stated that he wanted to be up front about who would be residing with him because it would be obvious that ██████ was not a family member. Watson stated that his relationship with ██████ was non-sexual.

Watson stated that in 2010 he had been hired at UNI on a five-year contract. As his contract was nearing completion, Watson applied for the SMSU provost position. Landing a provost position by the expiration of his five-year UNI contract was a trajectory he had set for himself. Watson stated that he was not asked to leave UNI.

When asked about ██████'s allegation that Watson had crossed boundaries with an SMSU student, Watson denied this.

Grace Crickette

Prior to recently leaving UW-Whitewater, Crickette was the University's Vice Chancellor for Administrative Affairs and Ethics Officer. Before he moved to Whitewater, Watson informed Crickette that a young man (i.e., ██████) would be living in his house. When Crickette asked Watson if ██████ was his partner, Watson told Crickette that ██████ was not his partner; that ██████ had a criminal record; and that he was providing him with a stable place to live while he was on probation. After the start of the 2019 fall semester, Watson informed Crickette that things were not going well with ██████. He said that while on parole, ██████'s probation conditions required that he remain sober, but ██████ had started drinking and using drugs. Watson also told Crickette that he started helping ██████ when he was at UNI. He explained how after ██████ and his girlfriend had a baby, ██████, the mother, and the baby moved in with him. Watson also explained that ██████ had indicated he might reveal information that would be damaging to Watson. Although he was worried that ██████ would cause problems for him, Watson said he was not in any physical danger and he did not want to abruptly kick ██████ out of his house.

Greg Cook

In May 2019 Cook began as the Interim Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. Cook stated that at his first cabinet meeting in August of 2019, Watson informed the cabinet members that a young man who he was mentoring would be living at his house in Whitewater. Watson explained that he was trying to get the young man situated, and he needed the help because he had had a rough life and was on probation. Cook stated that Watson was compassionate, but ██████'s recent conduct has shown that ██████ was not grateful for Watson's assistance. Cook stated that he learned that ██████ broke his promise to not drink or use drugs.

Kenny Yarbrough

Yarbrough started as UWW's Chief Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Officer in May of 2018. Yarbrough stated that he attended Chancellor Watson's first cabinet meeting in August of 2019 and heard the Chancellor inform cabinet members that a young man would be living in his house. Yarbrough thinks that Watson said that he anticipated that ██████ would live in his home for no more than a year. Yarbrough said that Watson did not say much to him about ██████. Yarbrough told us that Chancellor Watson sees the best in people, and he thinks that Watson helped ██████ as he did because he tried to see the best in him.

Kari Heidenreich

Heidenreich has been Chancellor Watson's Chief of Staff since he came to Whitewater, and effective February 1, 2020, she took on an additional role as legislative liaison for the campus. Watson shared with Heidenreich that he was not going to be hosting events at his home as it was a rented unit. Heidenreich stated that she had some concerns when she learned that ██████████ would be residing in Watson's house. These concerns were addressed, she said, when she learned that President Cross was aware of the situation. Heidenreich stated that in December 2019 or January 2020 Watson asked her advice regarding concerns he was having with ██████████ violating his probation. She said she suggested that Watson needed to address the issues with ██████████ immediately. Heidenreich said the next time she spoke with Watson about ██████████, he mentioned that ██████████ was moving out of the house.

Ray Cross

Cross was the President of the UW System when Watson was hired. Cross stated that after he was hired, Watson disclosed to him that ██████████ would be living in his house. He said that Watson described ██████████ as a young man with problems. Cross stated that he did not get the impression that Watson and ██████████ had a sexual relationship. Cross cautioned Watson to not take on more than he could handle. Cross said that Watson called him on April 15, 2020, after ██████████ disappeared for four days, and again on May 5, 2020, about trying to get ██████████ out of his home. Cross feels Watson was honest and forthcoming during these conversations.

Steve Leo

Leo is a partner at Storbeck Search, the firm that led the search process that resulted in Watson's hire as UW-Whitewater Chancellor. Leo stated that it was his understanding that Watson did not leave UNI while under investigation. The Provost at UNI, Watson's supervisor, had indicated as part of the background check process that Watson was never found to have engaged in sexual violence or sexual harassment at UNI.

Tim McKenna

McKenna has been a UNI attorney since 1988, and he is now UNI's General Counsel. McKenna confirmed that Watson was hired in 2010 as Dean on a five-year contract. McKenna shared that ██████████ was contacted by UNI's investigator on March 6, 2015. UNI investigated ██████████'s allegations against Watson, and the report was reviewed by the Title IX Director and himself. The report's conclusion was that Watson did not violate UNI's policy on discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct and – according to McKenna – the unredacted analysis section of the report fully and accurately captures all the relevant findings related to the verbal allegations ██████████ made in 2015. McKenna recalled the investigator had difficulty obtaining cooperation from ██████████.

Shenita Brokenburr

UW System Administration Sr. Associate Vice President Shenita Brokenburr talked with Watson about ██████████ three times. In September or October of 2019, when Brokenburr was at UW-Whitewater on other matters, Watson informed her that a young man was living with him; that his relationship with the person (later identified as ██████████) was a non-sexual relationship; and that he was a mentor to ██████████. Watson explained that without his help, the young man would be in danger of ending up in prison again. Several months later Watson called Brokenburr and expressed concerns about ██████████. He said that ██████████ was unstable, was not taking his medication, and he was volatile. He also said that he feared that ██████████

would accuse him of sexual misconduct. Brokenburr advised Watson to contact UW System General Counsel Quinn Williams. And in August of 2020, when discussing another matter with her, Watson informed Brokenburr that [REDACTED] had moved out of his house.

ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE

SMSU stated there were no records of any complaints/investigations in the personnel file of Watson related to sexual misconduct at SMSU.

University of Wisconsin Eau Claire stated there is no record of any sexual harassment or sexual misconduct in the personnel file of Watson.

Hamline University stated it has no records related to sexual misconduct complaints against Watson while employed at Hamline University.

Watson provided the investigators with an opportunity to read a redacted version of the investigative report that UNI distributed on May 6, 2015. In that report UNI concluded that Watson did not violate UNI's policy on discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct.

Steve Leo, a partner at Storbeck Search, provided the investigators with the search and screen documents compiled as part of the search process that resulted in the hire of Watson as UWW Chancellor.

ANALYSIS

Question 1 - Was Watson truthful during the hiring process when asked if he was ever found to have engaged in any sexual violence or sexual harassment at prior institutions, or left employment during an active investigation in which he was accused of sexual violence or sexual harassment?

Answer - Yes. Watson was truthful during the hiring process when he answered "No" to the question whether he was found to have engaged in any sexual violence or sexual harassment at prior institutions, or left employment during an active investigation in which he was accused of sexual violence or sexual harassment.

Prior to being hired in 2019, Watson was asked the following questions required by [UW System Administrative Policy 1275: Recruitment Policies](#): whether he was found to have engaged in sexual misconduct at any prior institutions, which would include UNI (where he was a dean), and whether he ever left employment during an active investigation in which he was accused of sexual violence or sexual harassment. He answered "No" to both questions.

As part of the background check during the hiring process Storbeck Search, the firm that led the search, contacted Watson's prior places of employment. We supplemented Storbeck's background checks during this investigation with specific records requests to UW-Eau Claire, SMSU, and Hamline. All three indicated that there were no records related to sexual misconduct by Watson.

Moreover, UNI General Counsel Tim McKenna confirmed that the unredacted section of the UNI investigative report reviewed by UW System fully and accurately captures all the relevant findings related to the allegations made by [REDACTED] in 2015.

Question 2 - Are there any allegations or evidence that Watson committed sexual misconduct with students during his tenure at UWW?

Answer - No. [REDACTED] did not allege that Watson committed sexual misconduct with students at UWW, and we found no evidence that he did so.

The sole allegation related to crossing boundaries with students made by [REDACTED] relates to an individual who may or not have been a student during Watson's tenure at SMSU. When SMSU was contacted, they confirmed that there were no records of any complaints or investigations in the personnel file of Watson related to sexual misconduct at SMSU.

Dated this 24th day of September 2020

Christine Buswell

Richard Thal